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Views of African American Males on their Educational Experiences

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**Views of African American Males
on their
Educational Experiences**

THESIS

**Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Educational and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the opinions of African American males on the American educational system through an analysis of their expressions about their educational experiences.

The researcher interviewed 40 African American Males in the following categories: second, fourth, sixth, eighth, tenth and twelfth grades, high school graduates and high school dropouts. There were five subjects interviewed for each category. A set of eight questions was used to ascertain the opinions of these young men. The researcher compiled a listing of the raw data as well as charts that quantify the interview results.

The findings indicate that school districts should examine their hiring practices as well as adjust other policies and practices if they are to meet the needs of African American males.

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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of African American males on the American educational system through an analysis of their expressions about their educational experiences.

Need for the Study

Many factors are at work to impede the academic/life success of the African American male. Even though this child begins his formal education as enthusiastically as his peers, research shows that he soon lags behind them socially and academically. This process begins shortly after he enters kindergarten and by the time he reaches the intermediate grades he is overage for his grade and behavioral problems have begun.

The purpose of public education is to provide its citizens with training necessary to become productive members of society but this system continues to fail many minorities. However the African

American males have the lowest social and academic success rate of all race-gender groups. The high rate of low school performance among black Americans can be viewed as a kind of adaptation to their limited social and economic opportunities in adult life (Rowan, 1991). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) also indicated that African American students' low school performance stems from responses to, and interaction with, the inferior schooling provided by White society. Research repeatedly states that African American male students are the least engaged of all students.

The Black Male has no dearth of current information written about him, though it is not positive by anyone's definition. "He has been characterized as an "endangered species," a "victim of genocide," the "most vulnerable American," and a variety of other catastrophic descriptions. The rhetoric of this condition is second only to the awesome statistics and painful facts which illustrate the most unfortunate circumstance of black men in America" (Akbar, 199, p.32). Garibaldi (1992, p.4) laments... "the negative indicators that describe a substantial share of this group's depressing condition is unemployment statistics, homicide rates (as both victims and perpetrators), their overwhelmingly disproportionate representation in the criminal justice system, as well as their last-place ranking on many measures of educational performance and attainment have become

so commonplace that it has caused many to view the majority of these young men's futures as hopeless and impossible to salvage."

Throughout the African male's history in the United States he has not been in a position to occupy the status that males of other ethnicities/nationalities have played in the development of their communities...the role of leader and protector. Though the enslaved Africans struggled to maintain some semblance of the family unit the brutal U.S. slavery system insidiously undermined it. As a result during the enslavement period, African men were not in command of their households and in fact the family structure, as we know it, was nonexistent. Over the past 125 years the African American family has struggled to restructure itself. Statistics show that a large number of African American males, as during slavery, are now not in the position to provide for their families. The failure of the American educational system to prepare African Americans in general, males in particular, has contributed greatly to this situation. The results is that large numbers of Black households are headed by single females.

The absence of the male parent from the African American household has brought about its own dark statistics, Wheelan (1991) writes that "one out of every four black children born lives in or below the poverty level..."...violence is creating a situation where fewer black men are available to raise their children (they're either dead or in jail),

black women have the responsibility of raising a generation of male children alone (pg. 22)". The average employed African American male is under employed earning two-thirds of what his white counterpart earns, given the same credentials. Low pay, along with other discriminatory employment practices, all too often leads to the African American male making decisions that results in his absence from the home. In today's economic climate survival of the black family becomes a real concern.

With many Black families consisting of the mother and children, young black males are often lacking positive role models to emulate in the home. Additionally, most elementary school teachers are female, thereby providing few male role models in the school setting (Wheelan, 1991). African American males tend to be under female authority for most of his formative years--his mother in the home and White females, who dominate the school system through middle school. This may account for some of the resistance strategies employed by African American males towards his teachers as early as kindergarten (Christmon, 1991).

Throughout the literature on the status of African American male students, very little was written from his perspective. Kunjufu (1984) and others have stated that children are a wealth of information if adults would only listen. Researchers have not

sufficiently tapped this reservoir of qualitative information which may give insight into how the African American male sees himself and the educational system. We need as much information as possible to grapple with this crisis in our community. There is a need to hear from the African American male. This study intends to bring that voice into the discussion.

Questions

1. Do Black males have similar experiences in their schooling?
2. Do Black males use similar words and phrases to describe their school experiences?

Limitations of Study

This study is limited to a small number of Black males interviewed in the Southwest section of Rochester. These males have probably attended the same schools and therefore had similar experiences. Conducting the same research in several locations may produce a broader scope of the attitudes and opinions of the African American males' educational experience.

Chapter Two

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of African American males on the American educational system through an analysis of their expressions when describing their educational experiences.

Literature Search

The ability to acquire an education, particularly a quality education, has a long and arduous history for peoples of African descent in the United States. Since the early days of the colonies, it has been believed that education and slavery were a lethal combination, that might cause an uprising among the people who would then realize that slavery was indeed inappropriate (Wheelan, 1991). The historical policy toward Blacks in general, and Black males in particular, has been described by Jones (1979) as one of "compulsory and voluntary ignorance.(p.138)"

Beginning with Plessy vs Furguson in 1896 through Brown vs the Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas n 1954, African Americans have used the courts and other arenas to fight for the right to have equal educational opportunities. African American females have had a scarce, sporadic success, yet to a great extent, African American males continue to this day to find many educational and social barriers to success. The

denial of these opportunities has created a nightmare for the African American community in particular and for Americans in general.

The African American male child faces a bleak, perilous future in America. Grant (1993) writes "Black males have the lowest mean levels of academic achievement. They are more likely than black females or white children to leave school before attaining a high school diploma. They are the group most likely to be in low academic tracks or special education classes. Furthermore, they have the highest ratios of negative interactions with teachers and classmates, receive proportionally more referrals for counseling, and are disciplined, suspended, and expelled from school more often than other race-gender children" (p.1). In an earlier document Grant (1988) concluded that "...education, broadly speaking, is only paying lip service to the educational needs of students of color" (p.111). Data of most achievement tests seems to corroborate this statement.

Tracking and the African American Student

For the most part statistical research supports the charge that the elementary and secondary education structures have not been advantageous for many African Americans. The cumulative achievement gap between blacks and whites begins in the early years of schooling and increases through the secondary years. For example, the practice of grouping children by ability in reading contributes significantly to the gap

widening as children move through the grades. This gap widens as long as the ability groups remain intact (Grady, 1990). In the long term this type of instructional policy brings about a severe handicapping condition for the African American male. In a statement to the House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Select Education, Grady (1990) reported that "The proportion of black males in advanced reading groups slips sharply after fourth grade. This appears to be the origin of a tracking problem which gains momentum during the middle grades; by the time they reach tenth grade, black males are significantly under represented in advanced sciences, mathematics, social studies and English"(p.476). Considering this policy, it is not surprising that African American males represent a majority of the enrollment in lower-level and special education classes.

African American males who come from economically stable homes don't appear to escape this malady. In one of the largest counties in the United States, Prince Georges County, MD, having one of the most affluent African American populations, a committee was charged with developing policy to address the dismal condition of Black males in their schools. The committee found an over enrollment of Black males, in particular, in programs for students with language impairments and emotional disturbances--the gray areas of special education (Simmons, 1990). Moreover, in this same county the percentage of African American males in the top reading group in grade 4 was 23% but by grade 6 that percentage had dropped to 12% (Garibaldi, 1992). These findings are not

unusual.

In another study of six classrooms in a large Midwestern city researchers found that 50% of the African American males were in groups identified as performing below grade level (Grant, 1993). Owens (1990) chronicles the disparity in the scores of Whites and African American children "African American children begin school only slightly behind their white classmates in educational attainment. By the third grade, they have fallen six months behind their white peers. By the sixth grade, they are one year behind. By the eighth grade they are two years behind. By the twelfth grade, they are more than three years behind" (pg. 61). Bridges (1986) documents that in all cases, regardless of the sub test or year of testing, Black males attained the lowest average scores within his study sample.

Learning Styles and the African American Child

Gallian (1991) and others suggest that there is a contrast between the style of learning that an African American child receives from his/her family and community and the style encountered in the schools operated by the dominant culture. The methodology in schools encourages competitive relationships and isolated seat work, coupled with a Eurocentric curriculum which reflects very little of the African American child's history beyond slavery. Therefore, it is suggested, African American people see little congruence between their historical and cultural reality and what they find

in integrated schools. Black males have additional problems that are unique to his gender.

Behavior typically displayed by Black males within their communities, such as “wolfing” (aggressive talk) and “jiving” (verbal kidding around) is viewed as hostile and threatening when displayed in the classroom (usually led by a White female). Often times teachers interpret this behavior as an attempt to usurp their authority and respond quickly with reprimands. Grant (1991) wrote of her observations of six first grade classrooms “teachers’ quick responses to minor misbehavior of black males were consistent with attributions of mystery and vague threat made about these students. Some teachers imply that Black males were ringleaders and/or potential adversaries capable of influencing behaviors of many children. These students’ tight peer cadres, and the counter cultural orientations... likely fed teachers’ anxieties” (pg. 16).

Retention, Suspension and Success in School

The report of the Committee to Study the Status of The Black Male (1988) found that adverse interactions between these boys and their teachers may account for the fact that though Black males represented 43 percent of the public school population in the 1986-87 academic year, they accounted for 57.5% of the non-promotions, 65% of the suspensions, 80% of the expulsions and 45% of the dropouts. collectively, these school

policies--retention, expulsion and suspension, seem to contribute to the condition in which African American males find themselves.

Poor academic performance among blacks seems to readily lead to non-promotion to the next grade. Retention not only has its economic costs to school districts but studies indicate that there are severe emotional costs to children. Morgan (1989) cited a study which found that twenty-six percent of a group of retained elementary African American students would not admit to having been retained. Eighty-seven percent stated that being retained led to feelings of sadness or embarrassment. A United States Bureau of Census Report, cited by Morgan (1989), showed that black males were being retained in school grades at a percent rate at least 20% higher than black females at the national level. And Black males and females were retained at a rate significantly higher than White males and females. In the Louisiana public elementary schools for the school years 1983-84 and 1985-86 (Gary, 1987), sixty-six percent of those retained were males and 75% were non-white.

According to Rowan (1991) in a June 1989 Promotion And Non-Promotion Report of Black Students at a Chicago Inner-City Public School, Black males had a higher non-promotion than Black females. Nearly 75% of all Black males in the ninth and tenth grade levels were not promoted to the next grade. While 40% of the ninth and tenth grade females were not promoted. Records also showed that the 1989 senior graduation class

included only about 49% of the total number who had enrolled as ninth-graders four years earlier. As these boys become overage for their grade more often than not behavioral problems set in. The implication is that lack of success and non-promotion leads to the high level of suspensions and high dropout rate.

Suspension as a policy has been questioned as a tool for bringing about desired behavior in students. Data from school suspension records of a medium size school district in the southeastern portion of the United States (Taylor et al., 1985) shows that beginning in elementary school, suspensions are applied unevenly to black males. Black males were the most frequently suspended elementary school youth representing well over half (fifty-seven percent) of all the suspensions in this school district. The pattern of suspending Black males persisted throughout their secondary school careers. Conversely critics of this policy have complained that this procedure teaches students that problems cannot be solved in school. It also relegates them to the worst of all places--the streets. For far too many of these youths these problems of retention and suspension (and often expulsion) lead to dropping out of school.

Success in the early years of schooling, especially in reading, is the foundation for success later on in school and in life. Studies show that reading performance in the early intermediate grades can be a predictor of school completion. According to Bridges (1986) the Black male child is not

only more likely to be suspended from school but also to drop out of school more prematurely than his peers. McPartland and Slavin write "Third-graders who are reading a year or more below grade level or have been retained one or more times are particularly at risk, and when these students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and attend school with many other poor children, their chances of eventually graduating from high school approach zero" (p.7). The US Department of Education reports that nearly 20 percent of all African American males drop out of high school (Wheelan, 1991). Since African American male dropouts can expect zero to very low income levels, a lack of an adequate and basic education has had irreparable economic impact on the African American Family (New Orleans School Board, 1988).

Other research indicates that poverty may play a significant role in the condition African American males find themselves and their families in. In 1987, one-third of all African American males, 15 to 24, lived in poverty compared to 10 percent of all White males in that age group (Owens, 1990). Poverty, usually due to lack of employment, has great impact on family structure. In a survey of nearly 2,500 inner-city residents in Chicago, employed fathers were twice as likely as unemployed fathers to marry the mother of their first child (Owens, 1990).

Results and Repercussions

Many African American males without an education, and therefore a

means of self support, find themselves entangled in the penal system. There is an obvious and direct link between educational achievement and the later ability to overcome problems and become a contributing, productive member of society. The connections are apparent to correctional officers who are almost able to project the size of future prison populations from third grade reading scores (Owens, Committee-House of Rep. 1990). Two-thirds of the Black male inmates in local jails have less than a twelfth grade education (Profile of Jail Inmates, 1980). Taylor and Foster (1985) laments, "Ironically, the Profile of Jail Inmates indicates that the percentage of Black males with twelve or more years of education who are incarcerated is less than that of White males with the same amount of education" (p. 504). Incarceration seems to run hand-in-hand with being a dropout, especially for the African American male high school dropout.

The message from research on African American males is a woeful one. These Americans are living a nightmare and this nightmare is being passed on to their families and communities. Documented poor academic performance and achievement, high suspension, retention and dropout rates, studies paint them as a disconnected entity on a sure journey of failure and a substandard existence.

Chapter 3

Design of the study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of African American males on the American educational system through an analysis of their expressions when describing their educational experiences.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects (n=40) for this study were African American males in grades two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, high school graduates and high school dropouts. There were five (5) subjects for each of the above classifications. Sixty-five percent of the interviews were done at a neighborhood recreation center. The center catered primarily to elementary through middle school aged children, therefore most of the subjects live in this area and many attended an elementary or middle school in the Southwest section of Rochester. The subjects in high school and those who have left or completed high school were interviewed at a

YMCA in Southwestern section of Rochester and others were interviewed at a barber shop in the same area.

Instrument

A list of eight questions was used to gather data during the interviews. A copy of these questions can be found in Appendix I.

Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from the directors of the recreation center and the YMCA to interview African American males who were willing to be interviewed. The researcher assured the directors that no personal information would be gathered other than the males' first name. In both situations directors designated an interview area and assigned a staff member to remain in the interview area during the interviews.

The interviews began with the researcher sharing some information about herself, her family and her "homework project" that she needed the interviewee's help with. After a brief exchange the researcher began with the first of the eight questions and proceeded through the list. The researcher tried to maintain a normal conversational atmosphere. Some

questions needed rephrasing and/or additional prompts for clarification. On occasions questions had to be skipped and revisited later in the conversation.

Analysis

The responses in this study are arranged according to question and by grade level. This arrangement was used to facilitate comparison of responses to a particular question as the subjects themselves changed and their maturity level increased. Subjects educational experiences varied (some attended suburban, parochial or private schools) and this format again, allowed for greater ease of comparison.

Chapter 4

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of African American males on the American educational system through an analysis of their expressions when describing their educational experiences.

Figure 1

QUESTION 1 : How would you describe school? and
QUESTION 2 : Why do you feel this way?

Group	No. of Responses	Positive*	Negative**	Neutral
Grade 2	10	8	1	1
Grade 4	10	8	2	0
Grade 6	9	3	2	4
Grade 8	10	7	2	1
Grade 10	10	4	4	2
Grade 12	10	1	6	3
Graduate	10	1	9	0
H S Dropout	10	2	7	1
<hr/>				
Totals	79	34	33	12
Percents	100	43	42	

* Positive statements about school environment.

** Negative statements about school environment.

Interview Data

QUESTION 1 : How would you describe school?

Grade Two:

Subject 1- a place for fun, friends, work and field trips...

Subject 2- a fun place, the playground and trips are fun...

Subject 3- fun, lots of things to do...

Subject 4- sometimes I like it; sometimes I don't...

Subject 5- enjoyable cause you're learning stuff and because I like homework...

Grade Four

Subject 1 - fun...

Subject 2 - fun...

Subject 3 - the worse thing...

Subject 4 - a learning beautiful place...

Subject 5 - a good place that I like

Grade Six

Subject 1 - It has its ups and downs...

Subject 2 -

Subject 3 - Its OK...

Subject 4 - fun and educational...

Subject 5 -kind boring , kind fun

Grade Eight

Subject 1 - I like school, especially changing classes, some teachers are alright...

Subject 2 - fun...

Subject 3 - mildly fun...

Subject 4 - fun and boring...

Subject 5 - fun, challenging

Grade Ten

Subject 1 - place for education to help you survive in life...

Subject 2 - It's OK...but sometimes it's not...
Subject 3 - Interesting...
Subject 4 - boring at times...
Subject 5 - So boring that I can't pay attention...

Grade Twelve

Subject 1 - fun and boring; we learn the same stuff over and over again...
Subject 2 - not too helpful sometimes...
Subject 3 - can be fun and it can be stressful...
Subject 4 - I hated it in elementary school, but I've learned to have patience with it...
Subject 5 - it's a learning experience; some stuff challenges you, some doesn't...

HS Graduate

Subject 1 - When I was in a segregated school, it was fulfilling, after inter-gration it was textbook like--it lacked personal identity...
Subject 2 - I have mixed feelings--it seemed like a cover-up...
Subject 3 - Boring....
Subject 4 - I could have had better teachers...
Subject 5 - I enjoyed school; some teachers cared...

HS Dropout

Subject 1 - OK...
Subject 2 - Just putting in time...
Subject 3 - All right, I enjoyed high school...
Subject 4 - It was like attempted murder on my mind...
Subject 5 - I didn't like it, but I had to do it...

Question 2 : Why do you feel this way?

Grade Two:

Subject 1 - I like teacher, the work and games...
Subject 2 - I like field trips, projects and the teachers are great...
Subject 3 - You have to stay in school to have a good life...
Subject 4 - Sometimes I'm tired so I don't like it...
Subject 5 - You can have fun learning...

Grade Four:

Subject 1 - 'cause you learn stuff...

Subject 2 - you learn new things...

Subject 3 - The teachers are mean, they blame things on us...

Subject 4 - I just love my school, I learned a lot...

Subject 5 - I like doing the work, I like the teacher...

Grade Six:

Subject 1 - kids sometimes don't act right, they should teach us stuff we need like how to handle our money...

Subject 2 - Because of the teachers, the way they treat us...

Subject 3 - Not a lot of violence at my school...

Subject 4 - My teacher did a lot of science experiments

Subject 5 - Fun teachers tell jokes when they are teaching; boring teachers get mad when you ask questions...

Grade Eight:

Subject 1 - There's a difference between how Blacks and Whites are treated....

Subject 2 - learning new things to help you in life...

Subject 3 - With your friends its fun, but the work is boring...

Subject 4 - Black people have an opportunity and we should use it...

Subject 5 - learning is not easy but you can get good at it if you try...

Grade Ten:

Subject 1 - Some teachers don't teach...

Subject 2 - Teachers are cheerful sometimes, stressed out other times...

Subject 3 - Stuff I didn't know I find out every day...

Subject 4 - Teachers don't make it interesting...

Subject 5 - I like the people and I look forward to going but, they teach the same stuff year after year...

Grade Twelve:

Subject 1 - Preparing for a test is fun, and if you play sports teachers are more helpful; boring when you do the same stuff over and over..

Subject 2 - Counselors are not helpful; they get angry when you need help...

Subject 3 - Fun to meet different personalities; stressful because of home-work, tests, mid terms, etc...

Subject 4 - It was like a baby sitting service, in high school I like the different

personalities (in teachers)...

Subject 5 - I like learning new stuff...

Graduate:

Subject 1 - Black teachers made you feel equal; white teachers didn't...

Subject 2 - sports is a waste of time, because white coaches don't help you and can't relate; the education is OK...

Subject 3 - Not enough to do, schedule had a lot of wasted time...

Subject 4 - They helped you if you played sports, but not if you didn't..

Subject 5 - I got along with teachers, but some didn't push you...

High School Dropout:

Subject 1 - Teachers thought I was a bad boy, bad for society (laugh)...

Subject 2 - Money could be made out side of school...

Subject 3 - It taught me about myself...

Subject 4 - They tried to murder my mind--stop me from thinking...

Subject 5 - It was too repetitious; not motivating...

Figure 2

Question 3 : What is/was your teacher like? and
Question 4 : What would you like for your teacher (s) to know
about you that they don't/didn't know?

Group	No. of Responses	Positive*	Negative**	Neutral
Grade 2	8	5	2	1
Grade 4	10	3	5	2
Grade 6	10	7	3	0
Grade 8	10	2	7	1
Grade 10	9	2	7	0
Grade 12	10	1	6	3
Graduate	10	1	9	0
H S Dropout	10	1	10	1
<hr/>				
TOTALS	77	18	51	8
PERCENTS	100	23	66	10

* Positive statements about teacher and teacher-student relationship.

** Negative statements about teacher and teacher-student relationship.

INTERVIEW DATA

Question 3 : What is/was your teacher like?

Grade Two:

Subject 1 - She likes to do special things like exercise...

Subject 2 - Lets us have parties, she's nice

Subject 3- She's good, nice...She probably had good parents...

Subject 4 - I like teachers, kind...

Subject 5 - She's fun, let's us draw after doing our work...

Grade Four:

Subject 1 - (Shrugged solders)

Subject 2 - OK , I guess...

Subject 3 - Mean, sometimes nice

Subject 4 - Teaches a lot; nice, but doesn't play

Subject 5 - Very nice, taught a lot; gives us gifts, like lollipops...

Grade Six:

Subject 1 - Mean; I like mean teachers cause you learn more; some didn't teach us--let us have our way and then test us on stuff we've never seen before...

Subject 2 - My teacher falsely accuses you; don't care about you; not organized; don't use good words; don't give me time to speak...

Subject 3 - Fun, funny; fun ways to learn; we did lots of experiments...

Subject 4 - Nice, points for behavior...

Subject 5 - Fun...

Grade Eight:

Subject 1 - OK, some had attitudes; didn't act kind; didn't like me...

Subject 2 - Easy to get along with; strict but made learning fun...

Subject 3 - Home base teacher was fine, others were bitter and mean...

Subject 4 - Did a good job...

Subject 5 - Mean; some care ; sometimes kids give them a hard time...

Grade Ten:

Subject 1 - Teaches are very individual, some are OK, some not; some just do what they're suppose to do--nothing else.

Subject 2 - Teachers have been pretty good all my years in school...

Subject 3 - It depends...some are nice but a lot are mean--they don't like me.

Subject 4 - I get along with them...

Subject 5 - They are good people; they want to teach but they don't know how...

Grade Twelve:

Subject 1 - mostly good...

Subject 2 - They should reach out to kids more; go on home visits if needed..

Subject 3 - They can be boring or interesting and fun; the enthusiasm of the teacher rubs off on the kids...

- Subject 4 - Some liked me some didn't; most conflict in high school, some teachers just wanted to teach their stuff and get it over with...
- Subject 5 - A few teachers don't care...you have to meet them half way...

Graduate:

- Subject 1 - In the segregated school I could be myself, I expected to excel; in the integrated school I felt unwanted and enslaved...
- Subject 2 - Very few teachers do a good job for you. Its the black, white thing; they live the suburban life and can't relate to us...
- Subject 3 - Snotty; some wanted us to learn...
- Subject 4 - They went through the motions of teaching--didn't put any effort into it...
- Subject 5 - Most of the teachers pushed me...

High School Dropout:

- Subject 1 - Fair...I guess...
- Subject 2 - Some courses didn't seem necessary...
- Subject 3 - Most were there to help me...
- Subject 4 - They weren't concerned about our well being; they'd mess you up if you weren't strong...
- Subject 5 - The teachers needed to work on interactions with students; many weren't personable, they just covered material...

QUESTION 4 : What would you like for your teachers(s) to know about you that they don't/didn't know?

Grade Two:

- Subject 1 - That I'm nice...
- Subject 2 - I don't know...
- Subject 3 - That something important happened to me--my grandmother died...
- Subject 4 - (No response)....
- Subject 5 - (No response)...

Grade Four:

- Subject 1 - I want to learn and I want an education...
- Subject 2 - Being ignored doesn't feel good...
- Subject 3 - I "was" an A student
- Subject 4 - I know a lot about science and math...

Subject 5 - I like working a lot...

Grade Six:

Subject 1 - I would like them to not go so fast; come and visit me...

Subject 2 - They know me but don't act on it...

Subject 3 - Nothing...

Subject 4 - They know all that I want them to know...

Subject 5 - Nothing...

Grade Eight:

Subject 1 - If they'd get to know me they'd know I'm a good kid; don't judge me by the way I dress (baggy clothes, pants hanging low, etc)...

Subject 2 - Nothing really...

Subject 3 - They might not think so but I'm really a nice kid...

Subject 4 - No

Subject 5 - No..I just want them to give me the right information...

Grade Ten:

Subject 1 - Teachers should try to understand kids more and try to have better relationships...

Subject 2 - No...

Subject 3 - Even though I dress a certain way (baggy clothes, etc) I'm still smart and I want to learn...

Subject 4 - (No response)...

Subject 5 - I want them to know my personality; what I'm really like when I'm not around my peers...like I love animals and airplanes...

Grade Twelve:

Subject 1 - That I'm going to goof around sometimes, I'm still a good kid...

Subject 2 - I don't like doing the same old thing, I want to try new things, I'm willing to try; I want something out of life...

Subject 3 - Not really...

Subject 4 - I want them to treat me the same as others, not baby me or be surprised when I know something (cause I'm a black male); I'm just as intelligent as anybody else...maybe more so...

Subject 5 - I'd like for them to know my style of learning; I don't like just talking...

HS Graduate:

- Subject 1 - I'm glad they didn't know me...it probably would have made things worse...
- Subject 2 - No, I was "real" with my teachers--they respected me because of my parents..they were always checking with the school...
- Subject 3 - No...
- Subject 4 - No--nothing...
- Subject 5 - That I really could be a writer....

HS Dropout:

- Subject 1 - Nothing...
- Subject 2 - They could have included homework into the class work to make classes more interesting ; everything was too stretched out...
- Subject 3 - I'm a private person...I don't want them to know nothing else...
- Subject 4 - Give me a real opportunity and stop faking it...
- Subject 5 - No, not really and I don't want to know them either...

Figure 3

QUESTION 5: What would make/have made you more successful in school? and QUESTION 6: How would you change/have changed schools so that you could/could have been more successful?

Group	No. of Responses	Positive*	Negative**	Neutral
Grade 2	8	0	5	3
Grade 4	10	3	4	3
Grade 6	10	3	7	0
Grade 8	10	3	6	1
Grade 10	10	4	4	2
Grade 12	10	3	6	1
Graduate	10	3	7	0
H S Dropout	10	1	8	1
<hr/>				
TOTALS	78	20	47	11
PERCENTS	100	26	60	14

* Statements that are a constructive critique of school, self or peers.

** Statements that reflect negatively on school, self or peers.

INTERVIEW DATA

QUESTION 5 : What would make/have made you more successful in school?

Grade Two:

Subject 1 - Teacher can help me work harder...

Subject 2 - pay attention, don't let others disturb me...

Subject 3 - Parents who help and teachers who help...

Subject 4 -

Subject 5 - Teachers tell me more; Read more...

Grade Four:

Subject 1 - They (Teachers) could help me more...

Subject 2 - Getting a tutor in math...

Subject 3 - Smaller classes...

Subject 4 - Teachers giving more examples...

Subject 5 - If they (Teachers) listened more; give me extra work...

Grade Six:

Subject 1 - Teachers didn't pick on me; Kids didn't bother me...

Subject 2 - If teachers were more patient...

Subject 3 - Keep the same teacher (as this year); pay attention...

Subject 4 - Speak briefly and explain more things...

Subject 5 - Pay attention, Read more, finish assignments...

Grade Eight:

Subject 1 - If teachers would get to know me...

Subject 2 - More time in school...

Subject 3 - If teachers would talk with us like we are all "real people"...

Subject 4 - Study harder; and some after school help...

Subject 5 - More African American History; Better activities-because in block scheduling teachers talk too much and run out of things to do....

Grade Ten:

Subject 1 - Tutoring and help after school...

Subject 2 - Being more prepared from the years before...

Subject 3 - Less distractions like home problems and friends...

Subject 4 - Study more...

Subject 5 - Me taking more responsibility for what I do...

Grade Twelve:

Subject 1 - More difficult courses; stricter teachers

Subject 2 - Studied more...

Subject 3 - I don't know...

Subject 4 - Classes where there is more hands-on and thinking; I don't do well just taking notes...

Subject 5 - If I applied myself more...

Graduate:

- Subject 1 - A black experience; rebellion set in--I resented whites...
- Subject 2 - Better student / teacher relationships...
- Subject 3 - Work that was meaningful and I should have taken school more seriously...
- Subject 4 - Teachers interested in kids and education....
- Subject 5 - Realizing the importance of education...

High School Dropout:

- Subject 1 - If teachers had had more enthusiasm towards teaching...
- Subject 2 - Classes based on what is needed in the world...
- Subject 3 - If I had stuck with my art...
- Subject 4 - Teachers who really taught...
- Subject 5 - School being more natural instead of rigid; it wasn't motivating...

QUESTION 6 : How would you change/have changed schools so that you could/could have been more successful?

Grade Two:

- Subject 1 - Nothing...
- Subject 2 - I don't know...
- Subject 3 - Stop the fighting (kids)...
- Subject 4 -
- Subject 5 - Make math harder...

Grade Four:

- Subject 1 - More resources and role models...
- Subject 2 - I would change the behavior of the kids...
- Subject 3 - If we used Peer Mediation more....
- Subject 4 - Take more field trips in science...
- Subject 5 - Make schools safer....

Grade Six:

- Subject 1 - Change schools so that they specialize in certain subjects with very good teachers...
- Subject 2 - Change some of the teachers...
- Subject 3 - Fewer students in classes ...
- Subject 4 - Have professional teachers..like some kids can do math better

than the teacher...

Subject 5 - Make courses more interesting...

Grade Eight:

Subject 1 - Change most teachers and their behavior...

Subject 2 - Better books are needed in public schools...

Subject 3 - Staff that can relate to the students more...

Subject 4 - Change the school hours...

Subject 5 - I'm not sure...

Grade Ten:

Subject 1 - I don't know...

Subject 2 - Make teaching different, fun...

Subject 3 - Make classes smaller...

Subject 4 - Metal detractors to make schools safer

Subject 5 - What they teach and how they teach...discussion is the key...

Grade Twelve:

Subject 1 - Cut out study halls, too many free periods...

Subject 2 - Make courses interesting..

Subject 3 - Staff who are committed and involved with the kids; and teaching is not just a job for them...

Subject 4 - Organize schools to teach according to the way students learn...

Subject 5 - Set up schools for students; my school is set up for the adults...

HS Graduates:

Subject 1 - The structure was OK, it just didn't meet my personal needs...

Subject 2 - Teachers should be from the city or trained to respect urban youth more...

Subject 3 - Give the kids something to come to school for--real kind of stuff for life...

Subject 4 - Get parents more involved in their children's education...

Subject 5 - More structured attendance policy for high school...

HS Dropout:

Subject 1 - Different kind of people to teach me...

Subject 2 - Courses and teachers that made sense; some times you'd have to ask a million questions to understand...

Subject 3 - School should tell kids more about life, jobs...
 Subject 4 - The entire curriculum...
 Subject 5 - More interaction between staff and students...

Figure 4

QUESTION 7 : How would you change/have changed yourself in order to be more successful?

Group	No. of Responses	Positive*	Negative**	Neutral
Grade 2	4	3	0	1
Grade 4	3	3	1	1
Grade 6	5	5	0	0
Grade 8	5	5	0	0
Grade 10	5	4	1	0
Grade 12	5	5	0	0
Graduate	5	4	0	1
H S Dropout	5	4	1	0
<hr/>				
TOTALS	39	33	3	3
PERCENTS	100	85	8	8

* Constructive critique of own behavior.

** Negative statement about self or teachers.

INTERVIEW DATA

QUESTION 7 : How would you change/have changed yourself in order to be more successful?

Grade Two:

Subject 1 - I would try not be so sleepy in school...
 Subject 2 - Work a little harder...
 Subject 3 - Ask for more help from my parents...
 Subject 4 -

Subject 5 - Read more...

Grade Four:

Subject 1 - Change my speech, so that its nicer and better, so my teacher won't think I'm mad...

Subject 2 - Study and pay attention...

Subject 3 - Try to focus on the teacher...

Subject 4 - My attitude...

Subject 5 - Do some work during the summer...

Grade Six:

Subject 1 - Make myself focus; take away the TV, videos and the outside distractions...

Subject 2 - Stay focused and pay attention...

Subject 3 - Ask for help more often...

Subject 4 - Have more equipment at home like computers...

Subject 5 - Stop clowning around...

Grade Eight:

Subject 1 - Calm down my attitude...

Subject 2 - My attitude...

Subject 3 - Do my best and Keep my temper under control...

Subject 4 - Stay home more and study...

Subject 5 - Don't talk back to teachers...

Grade Ten:

Subject 1 - Study and stay focused...

Subject 2 - Not talk so much and pay attention to the teachers...

Subject 3 - Concentrate on tasks...

Subject 4 - Change my study habits...

Subject 5 - Have less to say in class...teachers know I think differently from my peers and they don't want to hear me...

Grade Twelve:

Subject 1 - Change my friends...

Subject 2 - Have better study skills and habits...

Subject 3 - My study habits...

Subject 4 - Work on my math skills...

Subject 5 - Be more open minded and accept people's differences...

HS Graduate:

Subject 1 - Being more tolerant; I became a radical...

Subject 2 - Be more dedicated to my studies...

Subject 3 - Do more of my homework...

Subject 4 - I should have worked harder...

Subject 5 - I could have paid more attention to my work...

HS Dropout:

Subject 1 - My attitude...

Subject 2 - Not skip school so much...

Subject 3 - I should have stuck with my studies...

Subject 4 - I shouldn't have fallen for the trick; I should have endured it...

Subject 5 - More personal motivation...

Figure 5

QUESTION 8 : If you could build (like a scientist) a robot, which would be the best teacher in the world...what would it look like and how would it behave?

Group	No. of Resp.*	Male	Female	Black	White	Race Neutral	Gender Neutral
Grade 2	5	3	2	3	0	2	0
Grade 4	5	4	1	2	1	2	0
Grade 6	5	2	0	1	0	4	3
Grade 8	5	2	3	5	0	0	0
Grade 10	5	0	1	2	2	3	4
Grade 12	5	2	0	2	0	3	3
Graduate	5	3	1	5	0	0	1
HS Dropout	5	3	0	3	0	2	2
<hr/>							
Totals	40	19	8	23	1	16	13
Percents	100	48	20	58	3	40	33

* There were 5 subjects in each group; each subject gave 2 descriptors--a preference (or lack of) for race and gender.

Interview Data

QUESTION 8 : If you could build (like a scientist) a robot, which would be the best teacher in the world...what would it look like and how would it behave?

Grade Two:

Subject 1 - She would look like a regular person and she would always be helping someone...

Subject 2 - Just a regular person but she'd always be helping someone...

Subject 3 - I'd like a black man and he'd protect kids...

Subject 4 - A nice black man...

Subject 5 - A big, black man; he'd be good and nice...

Grade Four:

Subject 1 - A nice, dressed up man, who knows how to listen to kids...

Subject 2 - A tall blond man...

Subject 3 - He'd be a black male who writes compliments about kids and helps us with our work...

Subject 4 - A man who teaches a lot and who takes kids out and shows them things...

Subject 5 - Black woman who teaches everything...

Grade Six:

Subject 1 - Someone who could understand your feelings and what you need help in...

Subject 2 - Just a good, understanding teacher...

Subject 3 - Color doesn't matter; a nice, tall man, who can teach any age and is like a tutor...

Subject 4 - A good professional teacher...

Subject 5 - He'd look like me; he'd be fun, interesting--not mad all the time and teaches well; makes people understand...

Grade Eight:

Subject 1 - A black female, who asks kids about their problems...

Subject 2 - Regular human, black male; he'd be truthful, patient, kind, and have fun teaching...

Subject 3 - A woman who is a dark brown, doesn't dress too fancy and talks likes she's making a first impression all the time...

Subject 4 - Black female who is patient with kids...

Subject 5 - Black male who knows how to be firm but is kind...

Grade Ten:

Subject 1 - A wise, older, black man or woman...

Subject 2 - Race and gender don't matter but the teacher would like kids and know when to kid around and when to work...

Subject 3 - I don't care what teachers look like but I like young teachers who don't just teach by the book...

Subject 4 - Personal appearance doesn't matter; the teacher would be like a companion who gets along well with all kinds of kids...

Subject 5 - A young, black woman from our community, so kids know they can be like her; She would teach from herself and from the

book...

Grade Twelve:

- Subject 1 - a mean looking, short, bald man who makes kids scared at first but is cool with kids; he'd help kids with work and social problems...
- Subject 2 - Someone who talks with kids one on one--appearance doesn't matter...
- Subject 3 - A black male who helps students, gives extra help and clear directions...
- Subject 4 - Looks wouldn't matter but would know how each child takes in information...
- Subject 5 - I prefer a black teacher--I can relate to them better--with a fair personality...

HS Graduate:

- Subject 1 - An outgoing, realistic, firm, caring, understanding black person...
- Subject 2 - A black male with an open mind, patient, with good communications skills...
- Subject 3 - A nice black male who listens...
- Subject 4 - A black man who likes kids for themselves, has a positive attitude and likes to help everyone...
- Subject 5 - A black woman because she'd be strict but understanding; she'd take more time to be sure everyone understood...

HS Dropout:

- Subject 1 - A black person cause I think they'd listen to me more; a male because I think he'd understand me better; he'd be cool, understanding, balanced, listen to different perspectives...
- Subject 2 - A man, color wouldn't matter; he'd work with you; get to know and care about you and actually WANT to help you...
- Subject 3 - Somebody who is understanding and will to give 100%....
- Subject 4 - Black male, in the mode of a good father; strong and uncompromising...
- Subject 5 - A person of color who knows their subject, can control their classes and is caring...

Chapter 5

Findings and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of African American males on the American educational system through an analysis of their expressions when describing their educational experiences.

Findings

The findings of this research demonstrate the complexity of the dilemma the African American male faces. Except for the youngest, these young men are aware of their status in the American society. They refer to being a “black male” and the stereotypes surrounding their group. However many of their sentiments about schools are not unique, these feelings are also representative of the sentiments of other race-gender groups. During these interviews I gained new hope and new respect for these men. Their responses reflect keen insight into the relationships and issues in the educational system. I would like to share, not only my analysis of their documented expressions, but also some intangible perceptions seen through my interaction with them.

Describing School

Questions 1 and 2 begin the discussion by asking the subjects to describe school and reflect on their descriptions. For the most part the responses are positive for grades 2 and 4. The subjects seem to like the school environment and their teachers. Words and phrases like “fun”, and “a learning beautiful place” were used to describe their experiences and if there were problems, blame was not attributed to their teachers. However one young man (Subject 3, grade 4th) was already reflecting the attitudes of his older counterparts by stating that school was “the worse thing ... because teachers are so mean...they blame things on us.” Through the eighth grade the subjects described school with positive statements more than with negative ones. Even the the responses for grade 10 are evenly distributed, with 40% making positive statements, 40% making negative statements and 20% of the statements being classified as neutral statements. The tide turns drastically with the last 3 groups of subjects (Grade 12, Graduates and Dropouts). Of the 30 responses for questions 1 and 2, four or 13% were positive, twenty-two, or 73% were negative and 13% neutral. These older subjects felt that school was not engaging, repetitious, and that teachers, counselors and coaches were not always supportive.

As the subjects mature, two issues seem to emerge when asked to describe school 1) race is mentioned or implied (they.....us) and 2) the lack

of challenge in their school work. The subjects stated that race influenced how they were treated or that teachers and school staff were mean or not interested in their well being. These impressions were corroborated by Grant (1991) in her studies of six, first grade classrooms where she observed quick reprimands of black male youths by teachers for minor infractions. One Subject in this study stated that his teacher said that somehow she "just notices me more" when it was pointed out that she ignored the same behavior in another race-gender student. Subjects also made frequent references to the lack of challenging, engaging work. These young males referred to many of the hot issues in education today--mediocre curriculums and pedagogical practices, (Question 1) "So boring I can't pay attention (Grade 10, Subj. 5), we learn the same old stuff over and over again (Grade 12, Subj. 1), just putting in time (HS Dropout, Subj. 2), It was like murder to my mind (HS Dropout, Subj. 4)" and (Question 2) " It was like a baby sitting service (Grade 12, Subj. 4), They tried to stop me from thinking (HS Dropout, Subj. 2) ". These comments are heard from students daily--from all race-gender groups. However the results of these conditions appears to have greater impact on the African American male, affirmed by his lack of success.

These responses show, in my opinion, the urgency for educational reform. It appears from these conversations with African American males that they see the tasks they are asked to engage in as useless and repetitious. They don't see a relationship between their studies,

themselves and the real world. This idea is support by Lillian (1991) who finds incongruence between the Eurocentric curriculum, methodology of schools and the African American child's cultural reality. Perceptions of this nature has lead students in general, but especially African American males, to look for their own sources of engagement. Rowan (1991) has suggested that this is a form of adaptation on the part of African Americans to the limited social and economic opportunities in adult life. This lack of satisfaction becomes even more prevalent with the next set of questions.

Student-Teacher Relationship

The next couple of questions (Questions 3 & 4) asked subjects to describe their teacher or describe teachers in general and to imagine an open, close interpersonal relationship with their teacher(s). The responses from the second grade students were all very positive. But 50% of the students just 2 to 4 grades ahead, grades 4 & 6, responded negatively. Descriptions ranged from the " Shrugging of shoulders (grade 4, Subj. 1)" to "My teacher falsely accuses you; don't care about you; not organized; don't use good words; don't give me time to speak (grade 6, Subj. 2)". Question Three which asks "**What is/was your teacher like?**" accounts for the majority of the positive statements in Figure 2. As the subjects began to discuss what they wished their teachers knew about them (Question 4) it seemed to expose their true feelings. The boys/men's mannerisms changed and displayed a full range of emotions. From this interviewer's

perspective these questions (3&4) seemed to move the interviews from polite “I’ll say what I think you want to hear” as in responses to questions 1&2, to “this is what I really feel.” Evidence of this truly became obvious with Question 4.

Question Four asks **What would you like for your teacher(s) to know about you that they don’t/didn’t know?** This question caused most of the subjects to reach within themselves and acknowledge their desire to be cared about and accepted. As was stated earlier these boys/men are aware of how society has stereotyped them and they have developed a tough facade to shelter themselves from these perceptions. They seemed hurt that they are perceived as a negative element and then embarrassed that they were sensitive enough to find this hurtful. Most subjects took several minutes to think before giving a response. The only ones that responded quickly were visibly angry and harbored hostile feelings about their relationships with their teachers.

Figure 2 shows a dramatic increase in negative response in comparison to Figure 1. Even the second grade students appeared to come face to face with an uncomfortable relationship. None of the Grade Two responses indicated that teachers had close interpersonal relationships with the Subjects. As the boys advanced in age their responses clearly indicated disappointment with their teacher/student interaction with statements like “Being ignored doesn’t feel good (Grade 4,

Subj. 2), They know me but don't act on it (Grade 6, Subj. 2), They might not think so but I'm really a nice kid (Grade 8, Subj. 3), Even though I dress a certain way (baggy clothes, etc.) I'm still smart and I want to learn (Grade 10, Subj. 3), I want them to treat me the same as others, not baby me or be surprised when I know something, I'm just as intelligent as anybody else...maybe more so (Grade 12, Subj. 4), I'm glad they didn't know me...it probably would have made things worse (HS Grad., Subj. 1)" and finally "Give me a real opportunity and stop faking it (HS Drop., Subj. 4)." One Subject (5, Dropout) displayed anger when he said "I don't want them to know more about me and I don't want to know them either." It appears from these statements that interpersonal relationships are very important to these males.

Suggested Changes for Student Success

In the next round of questions, Questions 5 and 6, subjects were asked to suggest changes that they feel could have helped them to be more successful in school. The trend set by Figure 2 continues in Figure 3 in that negative statements continue to be the largest percentage--60%-- of the total number of statements made. Negative statements are those statements that reflect negatively on school, self or peers, while positive statements are statements that are a constructive critique of school, self or peers. Only 26% of the statements in Figure 3 were classified as positive and 11% neutral. For example, "If teachers were more patient (grade 6,

subj.2)” is classified as a negative statement where as “Tutoring and help after school (grade 10, subj. 1)” is classified as a positive statement. Statements like “I don’t know (grade 12, subj. 3)” are neutral statements that are neither a constructive criticism nor reflect negatively on the school community.

One of the needs that African American male students have is more support from the adults in their lives. When asked **“What would make/have made you more successful in school?”** in Question 5, many of the statements expressed a need for teachers to give more assistance so that students could gain a better understanding of the material being taught. Beginning with the youngest subjects, 3 out of 5 responses to Question 5 asked for additional help from parents and teachers. Subject 3 in the second grade said “Parents who help and teachers who help..” would make him more successful in school. In fact more that a third of the 40 responses to that question--37%-- indicated that there was a need for teachers to change their practice in some way. These comments ranged from “They (Teachers) could help me more (grade 4, subj. 1)” , “Speak briefly and explain more things (grade 6, subj. 4)” and “If teachers would talk with us like we are all “real people” (grade 8, subj. 3)” to “Better student/teacher relationship (graduate, subj. 2)”, “If teachers had had more enthusiasm towards teaching (Dropout, subj. 1)” and “Teachers who really taught (Dropout, subj. 4).” These comments send a clear message that schools are not meeting the needs of these African American

male students.

Question 5 was actually worded to assist subjects in reflecting on an array of factors that might impact his success or lack of success. In spite of this wording the young men still focused more than one out of three times on teachers. In Question 6 when asked directly about changing schools to support their success the subjects impressively touched on many of the hot issues schools are currently grappling with. Violence, “Stop the fighting (kids)...(grade 2, subj. 1)” and “Metal detectors to make schools safer (grade 10, subj. 4)”; funding, “More resources and role models (grade 4, subj. 1)” and “Fewer students in classes (grade 6, subj. 3)”; organization and structure, “Change the school hours (grade 8, subj. 4)” and “Set up schools for students: my school is set up for the adults (grade 12, subj.)”; teacher training, “Have **professional** teachers...like some kids can do math better than the teacher (grade 6, subj.4)” and “Courses and teachers that made sense; some times you’d have to ask a million questions to understand (Dropout, subj. 2)”; and finally curriculum “What they teach and how they teach it...discussion is the key (grade 10, subj. 5)” and “The entire curriculum (Dropout, subj. 4). As stated earlier, these young men had a good grasp of the educational system and their needs as students.

Question 7 then asks **How would you change/have changed yourself in order to be more successful?** Here subjects were asked to reflect on how they would or could make some adjustments to facilitate success in a less than perfect system. I also wanted to discern if they saw

themselves, black males as being the problem. Only one subject, grade 4 subject 1, alluded to a change that might be considered as demonstrating poor self esteem when he stated "Change my speech, so that its nicer and better, so my teacher won't think I'm mad". Most of the responses of Figure 4 (Question 7) are classified as constructive evaluation by the subjects of their own behavior. Out of 39 responses to this question 33 or 85% are classified as positive, a constructive self critique while only 3 or 8% was classified as negative non constructive critique of self or teachers.

These African American males seemed to be willing to accept their share of the blame for their lack of success, though they clearly don't see themselves as the main culprit. Moreover, their criticism of themselves focuses on behavioral changes rather than changes in their person. Throughout interviews the young men seemed to express a need to be accepted for who they are. They seemed unwilling to assimilate into the dominate culture and in fact seemed to really like their own African American male culture.

Teacher Preferences

The objective of Question 8 which is **If you could build (like a scientist) a robot, which would be the best teacher in the world...what would it look like and how would it behave?** was to find out these students preferences in teachers. Preferences in terms of

personality, race and gender. This was an opportunity for students to evaluate their needs in terms of someone to facilitate their learning and also someone to fill their need for a role model. The descriptors of how these “perfect teacher” would behave reveal the Subjects’ need for adults who are accepting of them, fair, knowledgeable, pedagogically skilled with good management skills, etc. Subject 1, of the High School Dropout group summed up the feelings of the majority of the subjects, when he said he’d like “A black person cause I think they’d listen to me more; a male because I think he’d understand me better; he’d be cool, understanding, balanced, listen to different perspectives”. As mentioned in chapter 2, white female teachers dominate the school system through middle school and unfortunately this in direct contrast to what is preferred.

In Figure 5, the chart analysis of Question 8, each subject gave two parts to his response--one part referred to race and the other referred to gender. Some Subjects also stated that race and gender did not matter to them. Figure 5 reveals that these subjects overwhelmingly preferred male teachers. Almost half of the Subjects--48%--said they preferred to have a male teacher. The reasons stated or alluded to were for protection, understanding, firm kindness, toughness, being cool and having a teacher who is “like me”. This was in stark contrast to the Subjects preference for female teachers which is a minuscule 20%. Thirty-three percent said gender did not matter to them. The trend to have teachers that are similar to themselves continues with race preference.

Throughout the interviews Subjects' statements show that they felt they were misunderstood by their teachers or yearned for teachers to take a personal interest in them. Many believed that this treatment from their teachers was because of their race. These Subjects felt that teachers didn't like or respect African American students and needed more training on how to interact with urban youth in general. Therefore when voicing their preferences for the "perfect" teacher in Question 8, Subjects clearly preferred African American teachers. Fifty-eight percent of the Subjects said they would prefer to have African American teachers. Three percent said they preferred white teachers and thirty-three did not have a race preference.

This sampling of African American males and their comments on their school experiences, if nothing else gives us food for thought. Much of what they have stated has a ring of truth and can be seen daily in urban schools. All too often one can observe antagonistic relationships between African Americans in general, males in particular, and their teachers. Second graders expressed enthusiasm about school, they enjoyed it and were becoming engaged. However by the time the boys were in the fourth and sixth grades the majority of the responses showed some sort of anxiety with the system., expressing "them against us" responses. There seemed to be a gradual build up of anger the older the Subjects were. As a result, this anger took the form of resentment towards the school experience and the

Subjects began to attribute these problems to racial differences between themselves and the White teacher majority. I believe this is partially the basis for the desire for African American teachers. The Subjects expressed a desire for someone whom they could identify with. A majority preferred African Americans, male or female, and when asked about gender a majority preferred males (46%) to females (20%). In spite of feeling that their schooling experience was not the best these young men did not see themselves as helpless victims with a totally hopeless future.

Recommendations

The data in this study clearly demonstrates the need to examine hiring practices in urban centers. As has been pointed out, the race-gender group that dominates the school environment in the formative years, the years when these students decide whether school is the place for them or not, are white females. This group, unfortunately, is the group Black males feel least comfortable with. As stated above only 20% of the Subjects interviewed preferred female teachers and even more dramatic--only 3% preferred White teachers. Based on this research it is recommended that urban school districts hire more African American teachers. Another recommendation is that districts should try to recruit more males for elementary schools.

Amazingly, even with the odds stacked against him the African

American males I interviewed did not feel all was hopeless. They believe that they have the ability to overcome the woeful statistics associated with their race-gender group. In addition to other reform issues that must be addressed to increase overall student performance, school districts need to implement changes that would level the playing field so that this group of Americans--African American males--can have an equal chance at reaching the elusive American dream.

Need for further Study

This study needs to be expanded in order to gain a deeper understanding of the outlook of African American males on the educational system. It is recommended that at least 10 or more subjects per grade level be interviewed. An effort should be made to include a representative sample of African American males from different economic backgrounds. Therefore it is advisable that the data be gathered from a suburban community; a large city; and a rural community.

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